

PSI AND SEXUALITY

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ABSTRACT

This paper initiates an exploration into sexual factors as relevant to the occurrence of psi. The bulk of the paper is a review of various areas which suggest that sexual elements influence psi. These include popular ideas, clinical observations of mediums and poltergeist agents, and the topic of homosexuality. This is followed by a review of relevant laboratory studies and theoretical ideas. The major conclusion is that psi is often associated with some aspects of sexual expression.

INTRODUCTION

There is a quote attributed to the noted sensitive, Eileen Garrett, which addresses the relationship between psi and sexuality (Phillips, 1980):

'Everybody knows about it, but nobody writes about it.'

This statement does not apply to the popular literature where publications abound. Yet the vast majority of the post-Rhinean revolution parapsychologists fail to discuss the possible relevance of sexual factors to psi.

Historically, there are a number of references linking PK to sexuality in mediumship (Morselli, 1908; Crawford, 1921; Schrenck-Notzing, 1920, 1924; Carrington, 1931; Dingwall, 1950; Fodor, 1959, 1966; Tietze, 1973; Underwood, 1973) and poltergeist studies (Price, 1945; Carrington & Fodor, 1951; Fodor, 1958). Also, some parapsychologists with a psychotherapy background have mentioned sexuality as a factor in paranormal events (Eisenbud, 1970; Ullman et al., 1973; Ehrenwald, 1977; Van de Castle, 1970, 1974). In recent years a few parapsychologists outside psychiatry have expressed a similar belief (Grosso, 1983; Roll & Montagno, 1984; Robinson, 1984). Yet to date there are only a handful of published experiments in which some aspect of sexuality (other than gender) was a primary variable (Fisk & West, 1955a; Rogers, 1967; Carpenter, 1971; A. D. Price, 1973; Ballard, 1975, 1977). Similarly, the topic of sexuality is conspicuously absent from recent parapsychological reference books (Wolman, 1977; Krippner, 1977, 1978, 1982). At least in contemporary academic parapsychology, Eileen Garrett's statement appears to be true.

There are a number of reasons why today's parapsychologists should devote more attention to the relationship of sexual factors to psi. First, the currently, popular *need-based* theories of psi suggest that it would be fruitful to examine psi in the context of sex as a human need (Stanford, 1974a, 1974b, 1977b; Rao, 1978; Thalbourne, 1981). Second, there is a consensus that PK is associated with aroused or tense physiological states (Roll, 1977; Rogo, *et al.*, 1983). This is consistent with a relationship between PK and sexual arousal. Third, laboratory results have shown that the attitudes and behaviors associated with the intimate and embarrassing topic of sexuality may be associated with psi-predictive variables such as belief in psi (Carpenter, 1971).

* I would like to express special appreciation to the following people for their helpful suggestions: Michael Thalbourne, Debra Weiner, Stanley Krippner, Carlos Alvarado, Robert Van de Castle and Karen McBeath.

In short, the notion that psi has a relationship to sexual factors is suggested by popular belief, clinical observations, current theoretical models, and laboratory experiments. This paper explores each of these areas.

The literature on this topic is too extensive to permit exhaustive coverage. It is the aim of this paper to stimulate further and more definitive explorations into the topic of psi and sexuality.

POPULAR LITERATURE

While it is true that popular ideas are often misleading or incorrect, they can be useful as sources or ideas for scientific investigation. It is therefore informative to touch upon some of the ideas expressed in recent popular literature. Certainly there is an abundance. One can find references describing everything from historical ties between sexuality, witchcraft and the occult (Farren, 1974, 1975; Godwin, 1972; Tabori & Raphael, 1971; Underwood, 1973), to the high rate of homosexuality among mediums and psychics (Godwin, 1972; Steiger, 1968; Brook, 1976). There are books describing the sex lives of alleged psychics (Steiger, 1968; Tabori & Raphael, 1971) and others telling how one can use his or her 'psychic powers' to gain sexual advantage (Henderson, 1981; Godwin, 1974). Some authors theorize a relation between psychic activity and either the menstrual cycle or menopause (Tabori & Raphael, 1971; Underwood, 1973). Most common of all are references to psychic phenomena being directly associated with either repressed or excessively overt sexuality (Psychic, 1972; Steiger, 1968; Tabori, 1968; Tabori & Raphael, 1971; Underwood, 1973).

The validity of many of the ideas in popular literature is questionable. Their abundance may simply reflect the popularity both of the topics of sex and of psychic phenomena. At least one investigator of mediums seemed to find considerably more sex than psi (Tabori & Raphael, 1971). Popular ideas concerning psi and sexuality also have not gone unnoticed by skeptics (Gardner, 1957a; Brandon, 1983).

In a similar vein, there has been a resurgence in popularity of the works of Freud's one-time colleague, Wilhelm Reich (Mann, 1974; Marin, 1982; Kelly, 1974). Much of Reich's work deals with sexual energy (Reich, 1973). How much credence one should give to his ideas remains open to debate, but some of the events Reich described are curious enough to warrant parapsychologists' interest. Reich's claims include using sexual or 'orgone' energy for purposes from healing cancer to bursting clouds and changing weather patterns. If Reich's claims can be taken seriously, numerous anomalous happenings surrounded the use of 'orgone' energy.

Today, critics view Reich as a crank (Gardner, 1957b). Yet one of his colleagues claims there have been some replications involving Reich's 'orgone' energy (Mann, 1974). Another individual of some renown, Bernard Grad, was a research assistant of Reich's. Grad has since performed pioneering work in the fields of biological PK and paranormal healing (Grad et al., 1961; Grad, 1963, 1965).

Both Reich's work and many of the other popular ideas need to be subjected to further testing. Yet many of these popular notions may have some basis in fact.

Historically, clinical observations made by physical researchers have provided a good deal of information. Most such observations were from field work investigations of mediums or poltergeist agents. The following section explores this area.

CLINICAL OBSERVATIONS AND SPECULATIONS

Over 60 years ago, psychical researchers were aware of the importance of sexual factors in their research. In 1921, Hereward Carrington presented a paper to the First International Congress for Psychical Research. In it he stated, 'There may . . . be a definite connection between sex and psychical phenomena' (Carrington, 1931, p. 146). The four reasons he cited are paraphrased below:

1. Physiological research has shown an influence of the sex glands upon both behavioral and psychical life.
2. Numerous Eastern and Yogic writings teach that sexual energy can be converted to energy of 'the higher, ecstatic states', such as Kundalini.
3. There have been observations of a number of mediums in which ectoplasm materialized, frequently from the genitals.
4. Clinical observations have been made of mediums such as Eusapia Palladino who demonstrated numerous sexual behaviors during sittings.
(Carrington, 1931, p. 146)

New observations and speculations during the last sixty years have continued to add to knowledge about psi and sexuality. Carrington's four points will be used as an outline upon which to expand.

Carrington's first point, concerning sex and psychophysiology, is still valid. The dramatic effects of sexual hormones on both behavior and the state of mind are well established today, and new relationships continue to be discovered (Herbert, 1982). Whether or not these effects extend to psi phenomena remains largely untested. There are recent speculations that '79 per cent may be an underestimation' of poltergeist agents with some kind of organic or functional problem (Roll, 1977, p. 402). This is certainly consistent with some kind of biological cause. Similarly, the average age cited for poltergeist agents is 14 years (Roll, 1977). Some have speculated that RSPK phenomena may be associated with the change in hormonal balance at pubescence (Carrington, 1931; Fodor, 1959). Another speculation is that psychokinetic phenomena frequently occur simultaneously along with a sexual experience by the poltergeist agent (Price, 1945; Fodor, 1959).

The current popularity of Eastern thought has also brought recognition to Carrington's second point. There are several references within the parapsychological literature to a connection between altered states of consciousness, such as trance states, and sexual or orgasmic states (Devereux, 1974; Davidson & Davidson, 1980). In addition, the description by some sensitivities of psi-conducive states is remarkably similar to the Kundalini experience (Angoff, 1974, p. 191). Recent work with Yogis has yielded some extraordinary results. For example, under laboratory conditions the Indian adept, Swami Rama, was reported to have moved a knitting needle, psychokinetically (Green, 1971; Schmeidler, 1977). This suggests that further study of Eastern techniques

would be promising. Somewhat related are recent descriptions of the out-of-body experience (OBE) which suggest that OBEs may involve a type of sexual experience (Monroe, 1977; Salley, 1982; Tanous, 1983).

Carrington's third point, concerning genital ectoplasm, is a phenomenon which has been attributed to Kathleen Goligher (Crawford, 1921), Marthe 'Eva C.' Beraud (Schrenck-Notzing, 1920; Carrington, 1931; Fodor, 1966), and Mina 'Margery' Crandon (Tietze, 1973). Findings implicating some fraud in all three of these cases weaken the claims (Brandon, 1983; Nicol, 1977; Tietze, 1973). This phenomenon is difficult to investigate today, primarily due to a lack of physical mediums. One possibility is that more sophisticated modern controls have made the production of such phenomena more difficult, whether fabricated or genuine. Another idea is that the current shortage of mediums is specifically due to new social attitudes which accept sexuality (Tabori & Raphael, 1971). The latter implication is that repressed sexuality is conducive to physical mediumship.

The investigations of a number of mediums support Carrington's fourth point. In addition to descriptions of the sexual behaviours and advances made by Eusapia Palladino during episodes of PK (Morselli, 1908; Carrington, 1909, 1931; Dingwall, 1950; Fodor, 1966), there are reports of sexual events attributed to both Willy and Rudi Schneider (Schrenck-Notzing, 1924; Fodor, 1959, 1966; Underwood, 1973; Dodds, 1977; Gregory, 1985), and to Jean-Pierre Girard (Dierkens, 1978). For Palladino, the production of PK was said to occur along with 'agreeable and even voluptuous thrills' (Carrington, 1909 p. 333). Girard's sensations during episodes of PK are described as similar to experiencing an orgasm (Dierkens, 1978). Rudi Schneider is credited with actually having sexual climaxes during some of his seances. This was verified on at least one occasion immediately following a seance by examining the swimsuit Schneider was wearing. It was also believed that Schneider lost his paranormal abilities during periods of sexual satiety (Underwood, 1973; Dodds, 1977; Gregory, 1985).

Recent statements by gifted individuals themselves also reflect an intimate relationship between psi and sexual elements. Girard stated that he had, 'to learn to be exhibitionistic' in order to perform before people (Dierkens, 1978, p. 156). ASPR subject and consultant, Alex Tanous, used a quote from St. John of the Cross, 'Like coming home', to describe the experience during an OBE. Tanous explained that an OBE involves something very similar to a sexual feeling (Tanous, 1983). Noted OBE experient, Robert Monroe, stated, 'There seemed to be a direct relationship between what I interpreted as the sexual drive and this 'force' that permitted me to dissociate from the physical body'. He added that a clue to this relationship is that, 'the most consistent physical reaction noted when returning from [an OBE] is a penile erection.' (Monroe, 1977, p. 195). In commenting on his experience as percipient in the series of highly successful dream ESP experiments at the Maimonides Laboratory, Robert Van de Castle said, 'I think sexuality plays a far more important role in the production of psi phenomena than we have ordinarily acknowledged'. (Van de Castle, 1974, p. 99). Eileen Garrett stated, '... sex is something I can use to produce, to create with, to transmute the energy into other channels'. (Psychic, 1972, p. 45).

These accounts provide subjective evidence for a sexual element involved in

the occurrence of psi. They also provide a glimpse at the personal dynamics and belief systems of gifted individuals. There appears to be in them an acceptance of various aspects of sexuality and sexual expression. Perhaps this is even a prerequisite for a psi performance.

Gifted individuals may also have a greater tolerance for different modes of sexual expression in others. Eileen Garrett expressed a lifelong understanding and tolerance of sexually ambiguous behavior and of homosexuality (Angoff, 1974). One interpretation of this relationship is that people who are socially deviant in one area, like sexuality, are more apt to be deviant in another, like unusual psi sensitivity. This could be due to an increased lack of concern about conformity once an individual has 'come out' or once he feels he has been labeled as deviant (Weiner, 1984). Ideas such as these, combined with the popular notion that a high rate of homosexuality exists among mediums or sensitives suggest that this aspect of sexuality is worthy of attention.

HOMOSEXUALITY AND PSI

The incidence of homosexuality in any given field is difficult to assess due to its history of stigmatization. It is an aspect of a person which otherwise meticulous experimenters might either miss or even choose to leave unmentioned for ethical or legal reasons. Homosexual behavior is still illegal in many parts of the world. One can assume that in published reports, the incidence of homosexuality among parapsychological subjects is underestimated. Yet we must be careful not to overgeneralize from a limited number of noted cases. The Kinsey (1948) studies estimated about 10% of the American male population to be primarily homosexual (Davidson & Neale, 1973). Excluding other factors, we might expect a similar incidence of homosexuals among subjects in physical research.

Many of the same points also apply to cases of bisexuality. Because of these similarities, in this paper cases of bisexuality will be grouped in with those of homosexuality.

It is possible that the notion of a high incidence of homosexual mediums may be true for popular mediums, where fraud and deception are commonplace, but may not pertain to genuine psi agents. This would be a form of the social deviance concept previously mentioned (Weiner, 1984). In other words, there could be a correlation between sexual deviance, such as homosexuality, and an interest in the paranormal which is quite independent of psychic ability (West, 1984). For example, Madame Blavatsky, co-founder of the Theosophical Society, has been labeled a sexually ambiguous psychic in the popular literature (Godwin, 1972) but her supposed psychic manifestations were reported to be thoroughly fraudulent (Hodgson Report, 1885; Nicol, 1977).

The idea that psi could be related to repressed sexuality might also be relevant when examining homosexuality (Krippner, 1984). Given the widespread social disapproval of homosexual behavior, it is consistent that a higher percentage of homosexuals would tend towards sexual repression. Along these same lines, it has been postulated that in many locations and cultures, a paucity of available homosexual outlets could lead to large amounts of sexual energy waiting to be expressed (Weiner, 1984).

Another possibility, promoted by Janet Mitchell, is that individuals who are more sexually androgynous are more apt to be psychically gifted (Robinson,

1983). Androgyny can be measured to some degree by such instruments as a *Masculinity-Femininity* scale (Spence & Helmreich, 1978). The supposition is that homosexuals tend to be more sexually androgynous.

Homosexuality is a difficult area to address, but that should not prevent examination of the relevant cases within parapsychology which do exist.

D. D. Home is probably the most celebrated medium in the history of psychical research. Though there are references to his apparent homosexuality (Dingwall, 1962; Dingwall, 1983; Inglis, 1983), it is a point which is often omitted. Dingwall (1962) has stated 'My own view, for which there is now considerable evidence, is that Home was homosexually inclined but rarely, if ever, allowed his inclinations any practical expression . . .'

The medium Eva C. (Marthe Beraud) and Juliette Bisson, the woman with whom she lived during the height of her mediumistic career, were said to have 'almost certainly had a sexual relationship' (Brandon, 1983, p. 160).

The brothers and fellow mediums Willy and Rudi Schneider were both cited as having female controls when under trance (Schrenck-Notzing, 1924; Gregory, 1985). Because both Schneiders were also reported to express erotic feelings towards male sitters during seances, it has been suggested that this was a channel for them to express homosexual desires (Fodor, 1959).

Satya Sai Baba is probably the most popular religious leader in India today. The claims of paranormal events produced by Sai Baba exceed even those of D. D. Home. Yet Sai Baba also is surrounded by several rumors of homosexual behavior (Chari, 1981; Thalbourne, 1983).

Recent laboratory cases which involve homosexual subjects include a participant at the Maimonides Dream Laboratory (Ullman, Krippner, & Vaughan, 1973), and another in a follow-up of the SPR home-testing experiments of 1950 (Fisk, & West, 1955a). The latter study involved the use of erotic symbols in a card guessing task. In addition, a few of the gifted subjects who have worked for parapsychology laboratories recently are known by this researcher to favor either homosexuality or bisexuality. Yet this is a point which has not been publicly acknowledged. Nevertheless, the opinion that a high percentage of gifted sensitives and mediums are homosexually inclined is shared by a number of parapsychologists (Stanford, 1984; Knipe, 1984).

Based on so few reports it remains difficult to assess the prevalence of homosexuality associated with psi. Still, if some aspect of sexuality is predictive for the occurrence of psi then the variable of sexual preference could prove both useful and simple to test.

Such tests can be moved into the laboratory; the arena preferred by most contemporary parapsychologists. Though there is a paucity of laboratory experiments involving sexual factors, some work has been done in this area.

LABORATORY EXPERIMENTS

A small number of laboratory experiments have dealt directly with the topic of sexuality. Most of this work has involved ESP with some kind of erotic target (Fisk & West, 1955a; Rogers, 1967; Carpenter, 1971; Price, 1973; Ballard, 1975, 1977), or in some cases an erotic reward (Stanford & associates, 1976). The results suggest that the use of erotic targets can interact with the sheep-goat effect

and to some extent can facilitate psi (Carpenter, 1971; Palmer, 1978). Specifically, when presented with erotic targets, subjects with strong feelings of sex guilt tended to show a diminished sheep-goat effect. In addition, Carpenter (1971) found that sheep tend to show less sex guilt than goats. He went on to postulate that people who believe they have something to hide are less apt to want psi to exist.

A successful sexual fantasizing technique was demonstrated by Robert Van de Castle when he was the percipient in a series of experiments at the Maimonides Dream Laboratory. Van de Castle, who was free to choose any agent, 'always chose the most attractive, physically appealing girl available.' (Van de Castle, 1974, p. 99). The evening before the experimental session, the two would spend time together establishing rapport. Then, upon going to bed in the laboratory, Van de Castle would imagine the young woman lying next to him in a sexually intimate way. His goal was to 'consummate a sexual relationship telepathically'. (Van de Castle, 1970, p. 17). Using this technique, they achieved highly successful results (Van de Castle, 1970, 1974, 1984). Because there was no 'non-sexual' control, this does not constitute direct evidence for the effectiveness of sexual imaging, but the results are suggestive.

A few studies have explored the suggestion that women's psi performance can be influenced by their menstrual cycles (Schmitt & Stanford, 1978; Keane & Wells, 1979). Evidence suggests that women tend to have more extreme psi scoring during their pre-ovulatory phase.

One study looked at the possibility that parents could use 'applied psi' to influence the sex of their offspring (Cox, 1957). The results are difficult to interpret, but they do suggest an effect when parents prefer a son. This is interesting in the light of the report of an above normal birth-rate of sons in China today. This has led researchers to suspect widespread female infanticide, though the imbalance remains a 'perplexing . . . striking anomaly'. (Morse, 1984, p. 89).

Other related laboratory research includes the *release of effort* effect (Stanford & Fox, 1975; Stanford, 1977), and male-female differences in psi performance (Rhine, 1961; Palmer, 1978). The release of effort effect does not, strictly speaking, involve sexuality, but, at times, it can be construed as similar to a sexual release. While the release of effort results have been promising, the results on gender differences have been mixed (Palmer, 1978). This might be in part due to other sex-relevant variables. For example, it is interesting that when Van de Castle (1971) was travelling with his son and acting as sole agent, he found significantly higher scoring with Cuna Indian girls than with boys. But when he returned on a later visit with his wife, the trend was reversed (Van de Castle, 1977, 1982).

A number of studies have looked at the effect of sex dominance in a group and of the sex of their leaders. Suggestive effects have been found when the leader is of the sex opposite to that of the majority (Wiklund, 1977) and for those of the minority sex in a group (Friedman, et al, 1976). Another study found psi scoring trends were dependent on whether groups were dominated by males or females, and on the 'dynamism' of the leader (Mihalasky, 1972). On the whole, however, there seems to be no trend suggesting that one sex possesses superior psi abilities (Palmer, 1978).

In general, the laboratory results mildly support the notion that some aspect of sexual arousal can be associated with psi. Yet, given the historical evidence for sexual factors, one might expect a more robust psi effect. Exploring theoretical ideas might help explain the weakness of the experimental results.

THEORETICAL IDEAS

One current trend in parapsychology is to favor *need-based* theories of psi. One example is Rex Stanford's Psi Mediated Instrumental Response model (Stanford, 1974, 1977a, 1977b; Rao, 1978). Another is Michael Thalbourne's *goal-oriented* Principle of Psychopraxis (Thalbourne, 1981). These models are relevant because they imply that sexual needs may be fulfilled by using psi. While most of the experiments which Stanford has performed have tended to confirm his theory, there are some interesting exceptions (Palmer, 1978). In one case Stanford found that the *need strength* hypothesis was not confirmed (Stanford & Stio, 1976). This hypothesis states that more psi will be produced with stronger or more aroused needs. One idea suggested which could explain the unsuccessful results is that the arousal manipulation was not effective (Palmer, 1978). This is a point which has great relevance to the issue of studying sexual factors in the laboratory. How does one insure that arousal actually does occur?

One aspect of experimental research is the possibility that a laboratory setting could inhibit sexual arousal in subjects. Becoming sexually aroused in such a setting is embarrassing to most people. Unless active steps are taken by the experimenter to encourage a sexual reaction, one is not likely to occur. This encouragement might include gaining rapport with the subjects and giving them permission to express themselves sexually.

The typical laboratory atmosphere may be especially sexually inhibiting for subjects who tend to repress their sexual feelings. On the other hand, an atmosphere which encouraged sexual expression might allow such subjects to demonstrate sexual feelings which are even stronger than average. If psi is associated with some aspect of sexual expression, then this could explain the curious dilemma of why repressed sexuality has been associated with both psi and the inhibition of psi. Different settings might bring out the two extremes of sexual expression for such individuals.

Not only is a typical laboratory atmosphere sterile, but often targets are intentionally subdued. For example, in an ESP experiment conducted by Price (1973), his targets contained the first letter of erotic words. It is questionable whether such a subdued target pool should cause *any* arousal. It is therefore not surprising that the results were non-significant. Another example is a non-parapsychological experiment which found no correlation between subjective and real physiological states when subjects were shown sexually arousing and repulsive slides (Skelton, 1982). Unfortunately, the study also found no differences in physiological states. The study therefore did not adequately test the intended hypothesis because it is known that different physiological states do occur.

Techniques suggested for studying sexual arousal include the use of penile tumescence monitors for males and vaginal plethysmographs for females (Van de Castle, 1984; Alvarado, 1984). These are standard methods which have been used for years in both sex and dream laboratories.

In order to adequately test a hypothesis relating psi and sexual arousal the setting must be carefully arranged. A set-up should be chosen which encourages sexual expression. In addition, there must be some mechanism to verify that arousal actually did occur.

Studies which try to elicit sexual expression in subjects also raise a plethora of ethical and possibly legal questions (Alvarado, 1984). For example, should unorthodox sexual behavior be encouraged? Should researchers in this area be knowledgeable of counselling skills? This is an area which demands careful thought. Yet if this is 'the nature of the beast', confronting aspects of sexual expression may be unavoidable if one is to elicit psi.

CONCLUSION

There is a considerable amount of evidence which suggests that the occurrence of psi is often associated with some aspect of sexual expression. This paper has reviewed a number of areas which support this hypothesis. Recent popular literature was described. While often misleading or incorrect, popular notions can be useful as ideas for further investigation. Clinical observations were shown to provide a variety of historical examples. There are many records of overt aspects of sexuality associated with psi. One example is a possible connection between homosexuality and psi occurrences. Such a relationship awaits experimental conformation, but the variable of sexual preference could prove to be a useful aspect to explore. Relevant laboratory work remains limited, but to a mild degree, it supports the notion that sexual arousal is psi conducive. Finally, recent theoretical *need-based* models are compatible with sexual needs relating to psi occurrences. In addition, the complexity of such needs along with the constraints of most laboratory settings may explain many laboratory failures.

There is mounting evidence that sexual factors are often associated with the occurrence of psi. Yet for some reason most researchers in recent years have remained silent regarding this topic. Although there may be a certain amount of tacit agreement that a relationship exists between psi and sexuality, the subject seems to be taboo. The embarrassing and personal nature of the topic, as well as laboratory setting constraints, make it difficult to pursue. Yet sexuality is a basic aspect of human nature with profound effects upon human attitudes and behavior. It would be surprising if such a pervasive characteristic did *not* affect other human facets such as psi. Parapsychologists should be encouraged to devote more attention to the sexual factors associated with psi.

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